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FLOOR DEBATE

February 14, 2003 LB 99

SENATOR HARTNETT: Mr. Speaker, members of the body, LB 99 is lodging tax reform. The legislation is permissive. It doesn't require any county to create a County Visitors Improvement Fund or change the...additional sales tax or spend funds for any particular purposes. The bill authorizes any county board to do what Douglas County can do now. Any county board can adopt a resolution to establish a County Visitors Improvement Fund, impose an additional sales tax up to 2 cents. It doesn't have to be 2 cents. It can be a lesser figure. All the funds from the additional tax are deposit into the County Visitors Improvement Fund. Expenditure for the County Visitors Improvement Funds are now...are used to be...are to be used to improve the visitors' attraction and facilities in the county, to make grants for expanding and improving facilities at any existing visitor attraction, acquiring or expanding exhibits for existing visitor attraction, or planning or developing such expansion, improvement or additions. The bill clarifies the provision of expending funds at facilities where parimutuel wagering is conducted, to resolve a concern from Grand Island. That is found on page 3, line 4 to 16; page 4, lines 2 to 222 (sic). It would permit funds to be used to improve an adjacent facility which has a "nonwagering" or "nongaming" purpose. Finally, and most importantly, all spending must be approved by the county board; no new spending, no new taxes without approval of elected county members. And after...when the bill passed, the Visitors Improvement Funds, whatever they use the funds for must be part of the budgeting process. Everything must be approved by the county. So I'd ask for...that's the essence of the bill. It simply treats all the counties the same option as they have in Douglas County, and I think there's committee amendments.

SPEAKER BROMM: Thank you, Senator Hartnett. We have committee amendments. Senator Schimek.

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. President and members. The committee amendments do three things, actually. They eliminate the new language in the bill which would have allowed proceeds of the County Visitors Fund to be used for facilities or to facilitate physical access to visitor attractions and